

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

Bence Tamás Péterfi

*Contributions to the Relations in the Hungarian-Austrian Border Region during
the Jagiellonian Period (1490-1526)
Crossborder Nobility in Hungary and the Holy Roman Empire in the 15th-16th
Centuries*

Theses of PhD Dissertation

Doctoral School of History
Head: Prof. Dr. Gábor Erdődy, DSc

Doctoral Program for Medieval Studies
Head: Prof. Dr. István Draskóczy, DSc

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. István Draskóczy, DSc

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I. Definition of the topic, aims

The topic of the present dissertation has originally been inspired by Otto Brunner, through the mediation of István Bariska. It was Brunner who emphasised the emergence in the mid-fifteenth century, astride the Austrian-Hungarian border, of soldiers of fortune and noble mercenaries, who amid the confused political circumstances repeatedly shifted their allegiances as dictated by their own interests. As Brunner observed, „just private wars”, feuds were fought among these persons, and among their predecessors and neighbours in the Empire, in the same way that would have been normal in case both parties had lived on imperial territory, where the right to conduct such feuds was generally acknowledged.

What interested me most was that thinly threaded network which, with its density changing in both time and space, connected in the late middle ages to each other the Kingdom of Hungary on the one hand, and the eastern marches of the Empire, the Archduchy of Austria, and the Duchies of Styria, Carinthia and Carniola, on the other hand. The presentation of this network, admittedly very difficult to grasp, is generally missing from the great historical overviews, with the only possible exception of economic relations. The relevant information, basically connected to landholding and genealogy, is dispersed in works dealing with local or family history.

I paid no attention to the network of connections which linked to each other settlements and their inhabitants, and ecclesiastical institutions on the two sides of the border. While, undoubtedly, such relations constituted sometimes interconnected layers of the same set of connections, I decided to neglect them partly because their inclusion into the analysis would have necessitated the use of very different sources, and partly because these sources promised to yield even more scrappy evidence than those relating to the noble world. Thus, following Brunner, I concentrated on the nobility; indeed, due to the scarcity of the sources, I focussed on the elite nobility. That is to say, on that part of the Hungarian, Austrian, Styrian, Carinthian and Carniolan aristocracies, which sought to establish relations with their likes over the border: served in the court of the king, emperor or other prince, married and did business with each other. Thus, the viewpoint of my dissertation has come quite close to that of the history of diplomacy of the classic type, with the important difference that my research focussed not on „official” relations between countries, as had been the case with older surveys of the history of diplomatic relations, but rather on those who were involved in these on both higher and lower levels, and their networks of connections. Yet members of old families with illustrious past belonged to this border nobility in the same way as did real newcomers. Moreover, the shifting from the service of one ruler to that of another was not the only and

exclusive characteristic of this „company”. They frequently helped themselves to estates, or entire castle lordships, by right of pledge or in full property, sometimes in the neighbouring country or province. Hence the apparently strange adjective of „crossborder” which figures in the title of the dissertation. On the other hand, a nobleman who acquired an estate in the neighbouring country was not necessarily an important political figure. From the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a constantly growing body of evidence proves that estates came into „foreign” hands by way of purchase both in the Hungarian Kingdom and in the Archduchy of Austria. How widespread the phenomenon of landowning astride the border must have been is showed by the very example of those Austrian burghers whom I have excluded from the scope of this research; they acquired vineyards in Western Transdanubia – and did so without benefiting from considerable political connections. Although such land acquisitions, while numerically important, probably remained on a fairly limited scale, the voices of their owners sometimes reached the ears of the Emperor or the King of Hungary, especially when paying the thirtieth or the ninth came into question.

The concept of double or multiple loyalty, elaborated in German historical scholarship, is in perfect accordance with what has been said so far. It was forged by the eminent medievalist Peter Moraw who, however, refrained from setting forth in detail what he meant by the notion. In any way, he applied it to the medieval phenomenon which consisted in a given individual's service of two lords (king, duke etc) simultaneously, while remaining faithful to both. Of course, the establishment of such multiple links by no means depended only on the abilities or „discretion” of the person who entered service. The lord who took him into service had likewise to consent to the conditions offered, for in most cases he was perfectly aware of the fact that his new man had already engaged himself to another prince. We have evidence attesting to this phenomenon from as early as the Angevin period. As a matter of fact, crossborder service was liable to condemnation not only by posterity but also, occasionally, by contemporaries. In the words of Florian Waldauf, informing his lord, count Sigismund of Tyrol, about events in Hungary in October 1490, „a Hungarian will always remain a Hungarian, whose faith and fidelity you can never trust”.

The aim of my dissertation was thus to help in the deconstruction of such prejudices, while, on the other hand, I tried to bring in line the results of Austrian and Hungarian scholarship, and arrange in one conceptual framework those sources which are preserved in different countries but concern the same topic, and have so far been interpreted in diverging ways. After all, my approach is no doubt fairly close to the positivist research methodology which, in the wake of the late Pál Engel and András Kubinyi, has been adopted by the

younger generations of Hungarian medievalists: if all loose threads are picked up as completely as possible, and the conclusions of the scholarly literature confronted with the evidence of the sources, one may stumble upon unexpected perspectives and results alike. I therefore embarked on an analysis of relations between Hungary and the Imperial lands, primarily in the Jagiellonian period, trying to nuance the general picture by an analysis which focussed on personal careers and local conflicts.

II. The Methods of the Analysis, Structure of the Dissertation

Researchers of the Hungarian middle ages have been working among truly enviable conditions since most of the surviving written sources were made available on the internet in the form of high resolution photographs. As the present dissertation focussed on the areas along the western border of the Hungarian Kingdom, it seemed obvious that the research should start with an examination of the archives of those families whose lands lay in these regions – before all the Batthyány, Draskovich, Esterházy and Nádasdy. The examination did indeed yield a considerable amount of evidence for the topic investigated here. Yet in view of the fact that individual careers could diverge into a great number of different directions, important pieces of information could be expected even in the most unexpected places. It became obvious already at the outset, after a look into the archival registers, source publications and the scholarly literature, that the source basis traditionally used by the Hungarian medievalists could be considerably enlarged. The key target area proved to be the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* in Vienna, one department of which, namely the *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv*, hosts the written material belonging to the central offices of the Holy Roman Empire. Within this, an inquiry into the *Maximiliana*, a chronological series of documents from the reign of Maximilian I, has proved exceptionally fruitful. The source material unearthed in Vienna was usefully complemented by the research undertaken in provincial archives in Lower Austria, Styria and Tyrol. Whereas in Innsbruck it was the part of the Habsburg registry kept there which proved very useful, in the provinces which once bordered on the Hungarian Kingdom, that is, in Lower Austria and Styria, family and estate archives yielded the richest material. The results of research in Austrian state archives were conveniently supplemented by documents revealed in the *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv* and *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* in Munich, and in a number of Austrian private family archives. (*Gräflich Hoyos'sches Familienarchiv*, *Hausarchiv der regierenden Fürsten von und zu Liechtenstein*).

However long the list of public and private collections visited may have been, the source material assembled, not surprisingly given the period investigated, is rather fragmentary. For this very reason it seemed more convenient to select some more completely documented stories, although of unequal importance, and present them in the form of case studies.

Thematically, the dissertation is divided into four major parts. The first, introductory section, while setting forth the reasons for choosing this topic, analysed in detail the source material available for such an inquiry and surveyed the scholarly literature. Having outlined the problem of „frontiers” in general, I then tried to position in this conceptual framework the particular phenomenon of „crossborder” families astride the border. Thirdly, I touched upon that part of researches into the period of Maximilian of Habsburg which proved relevant from the perspective of the present topic. And last, but not least, I have presented a scholarly *terminus technicus*, namely the concept of double or multiple loyalty, which in a sense clutches the three separate topics into a meaningful unit.

In the second part I have examined the way that some of the articles of the peace of Pressburg (1491), a crucial document of Jagiello Hungary, were executed. Two things interested me in particular. Firstly, the extent to which the rhetoric connected to the execution of these points and the practical situation overlapped; second, the means used by those who caused the anomalies, all of whom were „crossborder” soldiers, and the ways by which the two courts, their councillors and the local lords tried to solve conflicts that overarched the border. Of course, what took place were not ordinary cases of unlawful land acquisition by persons holding land in several countries, which is a routine occurrence in charters of grievance, but a conscious refusal to execute one of the points of the oft-mentioned peace of Pressburg. In the case of the Lower Austrian Mittergrabern and Gmünd, each concerned by one case study, it can safely be stated that they have so far been treated in works of local history only, which did not even try to put events in a wider context. In both cases, the conflict was rooted in the Austrian conquests of king Matthias; the two Czech mercenary captains who settled there, namely Mikuláš Španovský (Gmünd) and Jan Zvolský (Mittergrabern) helped themselves to the estates in return for their pay arrears. Wladislaus II, who followed Matthias on the Hungarian throne, took over as a matter of fact the whole political heritage of his predecessor, his debts included. Castles thus mortgaged by Matthias in lieu of unpaid salaries frequently remained in „Hungarian” hands until the peace of Presburg. This was nothing extraordinary, as several among the peace articles were expressly conceived in order to suppress such anomalies. What was extraordinary indeed in the cases

treated here, was the length of time taken by the process of repayment. In the case of Gmünd, the mortgagee finally came into full ownership of the estate after almost three decades, and apparently Španovský's son likewise managed to gather in his father's inheritance. The „usurper” of the other estate, Mittergraben, seems to have been much more skilful in enforcing his will, which makes his example one of the few exceptions: Jan Zvolský received the lands there in 1507, and his successors remained located in Lower Austria.

The third major part of the dissertation also deals with noblemen who settled on Imperial territory, but these, unlike the ones treated in the previous chapter, came not from the lands of the Czech crown, but from the Kingdom of Hungary. I have analysed the career of one member each of an old and illustrious and a newly rising family. At first, I have examined the career of János Kanizsai, scion of one among the most distinguished aristocratic kindreds of medieval Hungary. His case features both typical and untypical characteristics of the „crossborder” nobility. As a family with lands along the western border, several among the Kanizsai married from noble families based on the other side of the border. Yet their fidelity to the king of Hungary, with the exception of some brief periods of intense political instability (1459, 1490–1491), never wavered. Prior to 1490, the life of János Kanizsai apparently in no way differed from that of other noblemen of a similar family background; change came with the troubles and wars that dominated the years 1490 and 1491. We shall probably never know the reasons which prompted Kanizsai to take sides with those who had previously deprived his family of the estate of Szarvőkő (Hornstein). All we know is that his career took a very special turn after the peace of Pressburg. Not only was he the only member of his family to remain in the service of the Habsburgs after 1491, but he belonged to that handful of persons within the entire Hungarian and Croatian nobility who decided to do so at all. The exceptional nature of his career also lays in the richness of the source material which sheds light on it, and in his evident abilities which made it possible for him to obtain, at the cost of spending enormous amounts of money, the estate of Neuburg am Inn, and the comital title that went with it. This acquisition would have been impossible without the extensive financial resources he disposed of: the major part of the huge sum he had to pay for the county must have been raised through the mortgage of his Hungarian estates.

The fourth case study analysed in the dissertation, the story of Jakab Székely of Kövend, can rather be likened to those of the two Czech noblemen: besides being a true *homo novus*, military career opened for him too the way of upward social mobility. His abilities and political talents must have become evident fairly early. When he emerges in the sources in the early 1470s, Székely was already serving in the Hungarian royal court as a chamberlain, and

in the 1480s he assumed important military functions on the Styrian front as captain of the two important Styrian trading towns, Pettau and Radkersburg. In the late 1480s he held both financial and political posts, a clear sign of confidence on the part of king Matthias. After a shift of allegiance in 1490, most probably justified by the need to defend his most important Styrian acquisitions, Friedau and Ankenstein, Székely embarked on a splendidly documented career. It was not only in matters of regional importance that he assisted emperor Frederick III and later his son, Maximilian I in Styria, but also in a military capacity, such as in the 1496 Italian campaign or the defence against Ottoman raids. Nevertheless, and similarly to the three careers examined above, he did not abandon his estates in Hungary either. What really is conspicuous in his career, however, is not the astonishing abundance of sources which report on it but the fact that he rose high as an upstart and not as the scion of an already illustrious kindred. In fact, he was the only *homo novus* and „crossborder” noble to have accomplished as much during the reign of Maximilian I; all the others either got stock at a much lower level or gave up their crossborder interests very early.

In the third chapter of the third section more examples are enumerated in order to prove that „crossborder” careers were far from exceptional in the later middle ages. Both members of old and illustrious families and real upstarts are evoked there. The most spectacular examples of the former group, and at the same time distant parallels to the career of János Kanizsai, are provided by the Frankopan/Frangepán and Szentgyörgyi-Bazini families. In presenting these cases, I concentrated on their courtly and military activities in the service of the Habsburgs or, in the case of Ferenc Szentgyörgyi, in that of the Wittelsbach. I have also paid some attention – focussing merely on the most conspicuous features, as several of the individual family members would deserve a separate treatment – to land acquisitions in the Empire and marriages. Among the old imperial families with traditional interests in Hungary I have only examined the Stubenbergs. Yet their relevant efforts at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were rather feeble, and their results not even comparable to the achievements of the Frankopan/Frangepán or the Szentgyörgyi-Bazini.

In the next sub-chapter I have examined the cases of those mercenary nobles, such as Jan Vitovec, the Weispriach brothers, Andreas Baumkircher or Ulrich von Grafenegg, whose importance had already been emphasised by Otto Brunner. Unlike those families, examined in the major part of the dissertation, who expanded from the Hungarian Kingdom towards the Imperial territories, these persons and their descendants were characterised, in the manner of the Stubenbergs, by an opposite drive. While previous scholarly literature has paid a good deal of attention to those persons who rooted these families in Hungary, the next generations

remained outside the focus of historical interest. This indifference is in a sense no matter for surprise, as the period of the two Jagiello rulers brought few positive results for these families. Yet their efforts at survival without considerable losses are revelative nevertheless. However, with the sole exception of the Weispriachs, all these families disappeared with the generation that followed the charismatic founder of the family wealth.

III. Results

As the informal network which linked the Hungarian Kingdom and the Empire to each other in several cases interlaced the „official” channels and diplomatic relations between the two sides, it frequently influenced the settlement of conflicts as well, and the justifications brought forward in the political rhetorics became the real driving force. In fact, therefore, by setting cases which have hitherto been treated as mere local history in a wider context, one can look at the relations between the two sides from perspectives which reveal a lot more about the relations between the two sides than the level of „official” diplomatic contacts, very defectively documented in its details anyway. To put it very simply, the making of politics was, hardly surprisingly, characterised by a great deal of pragmatism.

The careers analysed in the dissertation can no doubt be said to have been extraordinary noble careers, and by no means typical. Yet partly through the means described in the chapter about the non-execution of the peace of Pressburg, partly in other ways a great number of other persons were also offered the possibility to use and abuse the privileged position of „crossborder” existence. And this phenomenon, indirectly, reveals a lot about the elbow room of both the Hungarian and the Imperial nobility. It also shows the border, while evidently having a separating function, to have been very permeable at the same time, and not only physically, but also in terms of social connections.

Yet it would be hazardous to speak about a general family strategy, especially in the case of such populous families (Frankopans/Frangepáns, Szentgyörgyi-Bazini). It is more accurate to regard these phenomena as the results of personal ambitions or the conspicuous career accomplishment of any given branches, for even the degree to which conscious political calculation underlay personal ambitions and achievements is open to doubt.

The size of the elbow room available for the „crossborder” nobility differed greatly under the reign of Matthias and his two Jagiello successors. The reason for this difference seems to have laid in the transformation of the „machinery” of royal power. In the time of emperor Frederick and king Matthias the Hungarian ruler was evidently in a more advantageous position. For it can hardly be regarded as a mere coincidence that it was

precisely the captains siding with Matthias and assuming a „crossborder” stance who made spectacular careers. Applying the imperative of „divide and rule”, Matthias supported all kinds of noble movements directed against the emperor. Jan Vitovec acquired an unusually great number of estates and offices, but his success was accounted for by the exceptional nature of both his position and the period in general. Without his cooperation the pacification of the southern regions would have been practically impossible. Later on, Andreas Baumkircher and Ulrich von Grafenegg looked for the support of Matthias in their conflict with the emperor, while in the 1480s the Weispriach brothers probably opted for the Hungarian king as the stronger and safer party in the Austro-Hungarian conflict, which was then gaining new momentum. After 1491 it was not the balance of power which shifted, but, after a brief period of transition in the early 1490s, the quality of the relation between the two sides had changed. The reason for this seems to have been the basically peaceful character of the period. Contrary to the periods of war, the Jagiellonian era can be regarded as one of prudent manoeuvring rather than one of dramatic shifts of allegiance. Truly important changes were caused by the dynastic turns of 1506 and 1515, before all on the level of courtly connections, which, however, benefited few people, and consequently caused much jealousy. Likewise a sign of new times was the close cooperation between Louis II and his brother-in-law, archduke Ferdinand, a consequence of the increasing Ottoman pressure. From 1522 on, certain Croatian and Hungarian lords were authorised to take pay from archduke Ferdinand of Austria, the future king of Hungary, a system that evidently made part of the general Habsburg contribution to the financing of the Hungarian military efforts. Then, evidently, no overt noble support was needed of the kind that had been manifested in the funeral cortege of Frederick III (1493), an event of crucial importance for the representation of power. The opportunities available to upstarts from Hungary, willing to take considerable risks in order to advance socially, must have become considerably limited by the reign of Maximilian I. It was probably due to his sweeping debut in Habsburg service that, alongside his undisputed abilities, helped Székely to overcome all difficulties and find a suitable niche for himself.

The careers, which differ from each other in a number of ways, can also be assessed from the perspective of possible further social advance. This may be a reflection of the wealth and social capital accumulated by the previous generation, but also of the ability and determination of the next one. Most frequently, however, the outstanding performance of a given individual could not be repeated in the next generation through an accomplishment of similar intensity. Although resettlement was not rare, very few families managed to survive, let alone flourish, for two or three generations, for in such cases generally it was only one

member, or at best his successors developing into a separate branch, who lived in the new country. Contrast is sharpest between János Kanizsai, who died without adult heirs, and Jakab Székely, who trod the path partly for his own children, partly for those of his brother as well. It is not for this reason only that the latter's case is unique among the „crossborder” nobility. It was also exceptional in that his successors married as a matter of fact not only with members of the Hungarian aristocracy but also with those in Styria, Austria and Moravia. Within the emerging international aristocracy of the Habsburgs' Danubian monarchy they belonged to that handful of Hungarian families who played an active role in merging the first few generations. Outside the Székelys, only the Frankopans/Frangepáns managed to make important careers in post-Mohács Hungary, all the rest, even the Szentgyörgyi-Bazini with their extremely illustrious past, disappeared from the stage of history as soon as the male line became extinct.

In view of this, it may reasonably be proposed that these developments may be regarded as a kind of prelude to the service of Hungarian nobles in the court of Vienna, which was becoming more intensive from the mid-sixteenth century on. Such an opinion would not be entirely correct, however. For, while the role these persons assumed was imperial indeed, it was in their capacity as subjects of the Hungarian Kingdom that they arrived to the Habsburg court in the period after Mohács. After the peace of Pressburg, and precisely in accordance with one of its articles, courtly or military services done to Frederick III and Maximilian I could equally be regarded as having been performed to the kings of Hungary. In practical terms, however, this implied no major changes. Small signs of a shift can only be observed from 1506 and 1515. The closing of the gap between the two courts, and their eventual merging after Mohács, coupled with the growing Ottoman threat, profoundly modified the available opportunities. After 1526 the „crossborder” nobility along the Austro-Hungarian border found themselves, without any territorial relocation, in the middle of a complex state structure consisting of countries and provinces which were highly sensitive about their independence. In this new situation, the degree to which they were able to use their uniquely manifold network of relations for the benefit of themselves and their successors was but a matter of will and ability.

IV. Published Papers

Az 1491. évi pozsonyi béke kiskapui. Egy cseh zsoldoskapitány, Jan Zvolský alsó-ausztriai birtokszerzése [A Sally Port: A Czech Condottiere, Jan Zvolský Sets Foot in Austria]. In: *Tiszteletkör. Történeti tanulmányok Draskóczy István egyetemi tanár 60. születésnapjára* [A Matter of Honour. Historical Studies in Honour of Prof. István Draskóczy on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday]. Edd. Gábor MIKÓ – Bence PÉTERFI – András VADAS. Budapest 2012. 105–115.

Korvin János zagorjei öröksége. A Vitovec-fivérek ellen vezetett 1488. évi hadjárat és háttere [John Corvin's Heritage in Zagorje: The Military Campaign against the Vitovec Brothers in 1488 and Its Background]. In: *Micae mediaevales III. Fiatal történészek dolgozatai a középkori Magyarországról és Európáról* [Micae mediaevales III. Studies of Young Historians on the Middle Ages of Hungary and Europe]. Edd. Judit GÁL – Bence PÉTERFI – András VADAS – Károly KRANZIERITZ. Budapest 2013. (ELTE BTK Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola: Tanulmányok – konferenciák 6.) 167–179.

Egy székely két élete. Kövendi Székely Jakab pályafutása [A Szekler's Two Lives: The Career of Jakab Székely of Kövend]. Pécs–Budapest 2014. (Sziluett. Modern történelmi életrajzok)

Aus Siebenbürgen in die Steiermark: Der Lebenslauf von Jakob Székely (†1504). In: Andreas Baumkircher und das ausgehende Mittelalter. (32. Schlaininger Gespräche [16th-20th September, 2012]). In press.